

Initial Questions and Answers (Updated 11/25/09):

Q: Why is this proposal being considered?

A: Walker-Jones and Scott Montgomery both have relatively low enrollments that have shown significant declines over time. The new Walker-Jones building has a large capacity that presents a great opportunity to give more students access to a brand-new facility. A larger enrollment would allow for a more robust academic program for all students through increased staffing. By building on the many strengths of both schools, we are confident we can enhance the academic, enrichment, and support services offered to all students.

Q: When would this consolidation occur? What changes would take place this year?

A: Both schools would continue to operate without change for the remainder of the 2009-2010 school year. If the proposal is approved, stakeholders from both school communities, with support from the central office, would work together over the course of the winter and spring to ensure a smooth transition for staff, students, families, and community. The schools would merge before the 2010 - 2011 school year.

Q: Who would be the principal of the consolidated school?

A: Both principals have demonstrated strong leadership qualities, from which DCPS would continue to benefit.

Principal Martin from Scott Montgomery would assume leadership of the consolidated school for the 2010-2011 school year. As the principal of Scott Montgomery, Ms. Martin and her team have built a strong sense of community at the school, founded on a commitment to dramatically increase student achievement in a positive, inclusive environment. Due to her effective leadership and collaborative approach, we are confident she would be a strong leader for the consolidated school.

Based on his outstanding efforts working with community partners, Chancellor Rhee has asked Principal Grant from Walker-Jones to transition to the DCPS central office to work with principals across the district in developing high quality, high impact partnerships for their schools. Beginning in the summer of 2010, Dr. Grant would take on leading this work, which would have significant impact on every school in the district.

Q: How would students from the Scott Montgomery boundary get to school safely?

A: The two buildings are 0.5 miles from each other, so in-boundary students would not have an excessive walk. We would work closely with the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and District Department of Transportation (DDOT) to identify safe walking routes, as student safety is an extremely high priority. Walker-Jones already has crossing guards stationed at the intersection of New York and New Jersey Avenues and two other nearby intersections.

We are working with DDOT to determine if additional crossing guards would need to be deployed so that all students are able to walk to school safely. Following a recent traffic incident at a nearby intersection we have met with DDOT and MPD to closely review safety protocols and implement a process to notify schools if guards are absent and ensure that supervisors regularly monitor guard presence at assigned intersections. Additionally, DCPS is examining the feasibility of offering a bus in between the two school sites in the morning and afternoon.

Q: What does the Walker-Jones facility offer?

The brand new Walker-Jones campus includes a 100,000 square foot K-8 school; a 20,000 square foot community recreation center; a 5,000 square foot library, science labs, and new athletic fields and playgrounds. The classroom spaces provide an optimal learning environment with large windows and ample space for teachers to work with students in groups or individually. All classrooms have new furniture, computers, and materials. Walker-Jones will host an open-house on Friday December 18 at 8:30 am and families and community members are welcome to visit the site and take a tour.

Q: Would students be able to continue to participate in existing afterschool programs?

A: We are committed to ensuring that we retain as much stability as possible. Programs currently at Walker-Jones would continue to operate as they do this year. The providers who serve students at Scott Montgomery have expressed a willingness to continue providing services to students either in the new space or by arranging to continue to pick students up.

Q: What would be the grade configuration of the consolidated school?

A: The consolidated school would be a Pre-School-8 school.

Q: How would the program offerings change at the consolidated school?

A: Over the next six months, the leadership team would meet with staff and other stakeholders at both schools to develop a vision for the program offerings at the consolidated school. The school community would have the opportunity to ask questions, give feedback and engage in building a shared plan for success.

Q: How would you address potential conflicts between groups of students from the two schools?

A: Based on the experience of recent school consolidations, we are confident that with appropriate adult support, our students would be able to form positive relationships across students groups as they get to know each other. Proposing this consolidation in the fall allows school leadership ample time to work with staff, students, and families to ensure a smooth transition. If the proposal is implemented, there will be opportunities for students and families to meet prior to the consolidation to help facilitate a positive school culture.

Q: How would staff at each school be impacted?

A: There would be minimal impact on staff at Walker-Jones, which would be considered the receiving school. Aside from circumstances such as budget changes or staff who receive negative evaluations, the staff at Walker-Jones would be able to remain in place if they choose. If the proposal is implemented, there would be numerous opportunities throughout the year for staff to learn more about the proposed plan for the consolidated school so individuals can confirm their continued interest in remaining there.

Scott Montgomery would be considered the closing school, and therefore staff there would be more significantly impacted. However, because the enrollment of the consolidated school would increase substantially, we anticipate that many Scott Montgomery staff members would be able to move to the new site if they choose. Staffing decisions for open positions would be made by Principal Martin once school budgets become available in the early spring. Scott Montgomery staff interested in working at the consolidated school will also have opportunities to learn about the proposed plan for the consolidated school and could express their interest in transitioning there to Principal Martin.

Q: What type of professional development would be available to staff members prior to the school year?

A: If the proposal is approved, staff members at both schools would be able to collaborate and do joint professional development this winter and spring to ensure that they are able to successfully implement a cohesive academic program for the following year. This would include opportunities for additional training as well as the chance to plan, share successful techniques and resources, and examine student data together.

Q: What would happen to the Scott Montgomery building?

A: Should this proposal be approved, DCPS would lease out the space in Scott Montgomery. DCPS currently has an agreement with the KIPP charter school organization in which they occupy half of the Scott Montgomery building. The existing agreement gives KIPP the first right of refusal for use of the building if it is no longer in use by DCPS. We have notified KIPP of this proposal and they have indicated an interest in leasing the entire building beginning in 2010-2011, if this proposal is approved.

Q: How will the central office support schools undergoing a consolidation?

A: If the proposal is approved, interested parents, teachers, staff, and community members from both schools would come together to develop a transition plan with central office support. This plan would include opportunities for groups of students, parents, staff, and community to meet and get to know each other, and for school staff to work together professionally to develop a shared vision for success. Depending on identified needs, other DCPS staff and representatives of city agencies such as MPD and DDOT will also provide support.

Q: What would the name of the consolidated school be?

A: This has not been determined yet. We would engage with the impacted school communities to decide this.

Q: If the proposal is approved, would Scott Montgomery parents have to apply through the out-of-boundary lottery to secure a space for their child at the consolidated school?

A: No. All students attending currently Scott Montgomery (either in or out of boundary) would have an automatic right to attend the consolidated school. If the proposal is approved, current Scott Montgomery students would also receive a weighted preference in the out-of-boundary lottery process. This process takes place in February and offers an opportunity for parents to apply for enrollment at a school outside their neighborhood school. Scott Montgomery students would have the second preference in the out-of-boundary lottery, after siblings, due to their status as students at a closing school.

Q: What supports would be provided to Principal Martin to assist her in transitioning from a PK-4 to a PK-8 school?

A: We feel confident that Principal Martin's leadership skills would transfer well to the consolidated school. She has previously worked as an administrator at the Capitol Hill Cluster, which serves students in PK-8 and would work with a leadership team that includes Mr. Ellis and Mr. Hill who both have experience in PK-8 schools. They will all receive ongoing support on implementing a high quality PK-8 model from the instructional superintendent's office.

Q: Why isn't DCPS proposing to panel for the school leader for the consolidated school?

A: The principal paneling process is used when there is a vacancy at the end of a school year due to resignations, retirements, or non-reappointments. In the case of consolidations, we first look at each of the merging schools to see if there is a strong candidate to assume leadership of the consolidated school and help preserve a level of continuity. In this case, we were fortunate to have two strong school leaders to choose from. As a result of his leadership of Walker-Jones, Chancellor Rhee has asked Dr. Grant to work in the central office to improve the quality of partnerships for schools across the school system. Principal Martin has an exceptional record of leadership at Scott Montgomery and her focus on collaboration and community outreach make her an excellent candidate to lead a consolidated school.